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to rescue
sex workers,
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their safety



MULLEN A very late encore act *p. 6*

FOOD A little something Mortimer's *p. 15*

MUSIC Becky Kapell gets silly *p. 29*

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7 FEATURE
LET US SURVIVE

In an attempt to rescue sex workers, Congress threatens their safety *By Susan Du*

4 NEWS
THE SHORTLIST
Diabetics get price-gouged

MULLEN
Two decades after her assault, a comic returns

15 FOOD
MORTIMER'S
The Lyndale dive is reborn

16 A-LIST
MSP COMICON
Get geeky at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds

23 FILM
DEADPOOL 2
Ryan Reynolds returns

25 THEATER
SPEECHLESS
The Moving Company explores grief

27 FASHION
MAYDAY
Festival season springs to life

29 MUSIC
BECKY KAPELL
That Certain Ache embraces and updates classic country

30 CRITICS' PICKS

31 FREE WILL
ASTROLOGY
CROSSWORD

32 CLASSIFIEDS
SAVAGE LOVE

cover credit
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THE SHORTLIST

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61%

Percentage of Republicans who believe the FBI and Robert Mueller are trying to frame the president

"Ayn Rand, Rand Paul, and Paul Ryan walk into a bar and order a drink. The bartender serves them tainted alcohol and they die because there are no regulations. The end."

Reader Richard King responds to "Minneapolis cracks down on 'members-only' Uptown grocer," at citypages.com.

UN-AMERICAN

NOTHING QUITE FITS the term "un-American" like voter ID laws, employed in conservative states to suppress the vote among urbanites, minorities, and the young—with a whole lot of elderly people caught in the crossfire.

This despite the fact that voter fraud is nearly non-existent—an infinitesimal fraction of 1 percent. Yet our GOP neighbors in Wisconsin have turned it into an art form to rig victory.

A new study estimates that 200,000 Wisconsin voters were barred from voting during the 2016 elections. Consider: Donald Trump won the state by only 22,748 votes.

POPULAR STORIES

AT CITYPAGES.COM

Shit: **SARAH BRAASCH**, Yale student who called cops on napping black woman, is from Minnesota

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The miracle of **FINLAND**: What a tiny northern Minnesota town can teach America

Absolutely delightful Minneapolis man wins big on **'THE PRICE IS RIGHT'**

The Last Laugh

An assault ended Karen Pickering's comedy career. She wants it back.

One night in the mid-1980s, Karen Pickering's mom decided to prepare her daughter for the real world. That meant men.

Her mom's abusive second husband was out of the picture by the time the two of them stood in a San Diego kitchen, roleplaying how Pickering should handle herself.

Pickering, then a radio DJ, started to hear "horror stories" of what friends from the University of Minnesota were going through in their first professional gigs. "We didn't have HR departments," she says.

As she began to try her hand at standup comedy, Pickering combined her mom's techniques with her own: pay attention, act tough, park near the club under a street light.

Pickering returned to Minnesota to live with a Joey Ramone lookalike from New Jersey. They both loved Bon Jovi. She realized she'd made a "wretched mistake," one she missed for material. The new stuff was a hit.

"It was real, and the audience senses that," Pickering says. "And it's funny, because everyone's done dumb shit."

Pickering spent hours at public libraries, reading news stories and writing jokes. She arrived at clubs with a briefcase-full, and recorded all her sets to play back later. She did a bit about handing first dates a questionnaire—"Do you have a checking account?"—and another about the chances Nancy Reagan's "skinny little neck" would someday get sucked up into the blades of the Marine One helicopter.

One time, a big-name local comic said something "inappropriate" to Karen.

"You should lose some weight," she shot back, "or I'm going to be a pallbearer at your funeral." Pickering never opened for him again. "I think I had a reputation for treating everything like business, and being a real bitch," she says.

During the day, Pickering sold office supplies. She saved PTO and vacation days for gigs in Denver and Chicago. Often, "some low-grade comic" followed her to her car. Guys guessed any woman alone on the road was up for something. Pickering turned them down or told them off.

By the early 1990s, Pickering was making trips to New York, where she knew talent agents and casting directors pulled nobodies from the stage for their big break.

After one show, a friend, someone she'd known for years, had her boyfriend walk Karen to her car. "I don't need to tell you what happened," she says.

Pickering had done everything right. Played it cautious, avoided weird scenes, used the buddy system, and didn't trust strangers. She still wound up "pretty beaten up" at a New York City police station, telling a cop a story, and the name of her rapist. If police or prosecutors pursued the case, they didn't bother to inform Karen.

Back in Minnesota, she went to therapy, working through post-traumatic stress and "a lot of anger." She quit the nightclub circuit. She played a few corporate gigs in small,

safe, private settings, then stopped doing even those.

"It did kinda take away a dream," she says of her assault.

Pickering shifted her attention to family and career. Well, careers: After selling office supplies, she worked as an assistant manager at a chain of gyms, supervisor for the restaurant at a Macy's in Burnsville, and a school lunch lady. Today, she sells shoes.

Earlier this decade, as Karen's teenage kids flipped through a scrapbook, they learned of their mom's comedy heyday. They told her to try again.

Karen's encore came at a cancer benefit a friend was organizing in Rush City. She still plays that benefit, slotting it into ever-busier weeks at open mics and comedy contests.

She tells jokes about marrying a Minnesotan—"the Lutheran," she calls him—and the drunken, debauched sights of the Minnesota State Fair, when we let our "inner Bostonian" out. She talks a mile a minute, saves the sex stuff for the later (drunken) crowds, and knows how to turn an audience against the table of loudmouths.

Comedian Rana May saw Pickering's ease onstage instantly. May didn't know Karen's story, but liked how humble she was.

"Oh, I'm rusty," Pickering would tell May, who says Karen's act "made being a mom who lives in the suburbs relatable, and that's not a viewpoint I've ever even wanted to have."

May invited Pickering to join an online



Mike Mullen

network, a support group that sometimes warns women comics about predatory men.

May sees comics like Pickering—"a great, supportive, conscientious person"—as having come of age in an in-between period. Women learned to be "tough," and protect themselves, but when men did bad things, they had nowhere to turn.

"I feel like we enabled a lot of things," Pickering says, "because it was the way to keep our jobs."

The culture has finally advanced, slightly. Even comedy has moved forward—see: the swift downfall of Louis C.K.—albeit in lurching, ugly steps. Pickering loves the sisterly streak she sees in young comics like May, and admires how entrepreneurial this crop of women is. If this is the new comedy industry, she wants to be part of it.

"It's more than a hobby for me now," she says. "I'd like to get my material tweaked a little—then save up my PTO and vacation days, and take some risks." ☒

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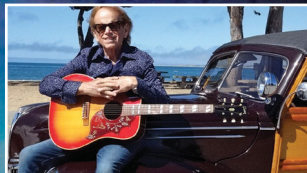
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I. THE DEFENSE OF THE DAMSELS

The day the gallantly named “Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act” (SESTA) came before the U.S. Senate, a four-hour procession of lawmakers ascended the rostrum to congratulate each other on a rare act of bipartisanship.

The bill in question was never really up for debate. It was sold as way to rein back a modern surge in the sexual enslavement of women and girls, making use of the internet to enable prostitution punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

As fuel for the cause, the law’s chief authors projected a photograph of Desiree Robinson, a pretty, bespectacled 16-year-old runaway from Chicago who turned up beaten and stabbed to death in a garage after being sold on Backpage.com.

Cracking down on the parasites who made millions from the exploitation of children was a singular moral imperative, its proponents declared. Just one senator, Ron Wyden (D-Oregon), begged to differ.

“I fear that it’s going to do more to take down ads than to take down traffickers,” he said. “I fear it will send these monsters, these evil people who traffic, beyond the grasp of law enforcement to the shadowy corners of the dark web, a place where everyday search engines don’t go, and it’s going to be even easier for criminals, these vicious traffickers, to find a safe haven.”

Wyden’s reasoning was met with indifference. In April, President Donald Trump signed SESTA — along with its sister bill “Fight Sex Trafficking Online Act” (FOSTA) — into law.

But if the measures were supposed to protect sex workers, no one bothered to consult them. The threat to their well-being was immediate.

The FBI raided Backpage’s offices and shut down the site. Dozens of other ad boards soon followed. The forums escorts used to verify johns’ identities vanished. The networks they used to communicate with each other, trading references and bad date lists of men known to rob and rape, went dark.

“It’s unambiguously evil,” Baylor University professor Scott Cunningham says of the laws.

His 2017 study on Craigslist’s personals section is the only empirical analysis of online sex ads’ effect on violence against women. Its conclusion: The internet reduced female homicides by 17.4 percent.

“If you care about violence against women — and you should — you absolutely need to care about how FOSTA is

IN AN ATTEMPT TO RESCUE SEX WORKERS, CONGRESS THREATENS THEIR SAFETY



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unambiguously harming these women,” Cunningham says.

“And if you believe that most of this market is just trafficked women, or if you define trafficking through the sleight of hand that basically says, philosophically, all prostitution is sex trafficking, you need to talk to some sex workers and ask them if they’re trafficked.”

II.

A DIFFERENT SORT OF SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Women in short skirts prowling the streets at the command of pimps leering hawkishly from the gloom. That’s the popular stereotype of the prostitute. It’s 20 years out of date.

The internet transformed the sex industry in every way, paving the road for vast new enterprises such as video camming, pornographic clip sales, and online role-play. It also made the business much safer.

Many sex workers were no longer obligated to patrol the streets, removing the need for pimps as protection. Initial encounters could be conducted through computers, allowing for the negotiation of rates and boundaries before meeting in person. Potential customers could be vetted through peers, letting women avoid johns with histories of violence or refusal to pay.

For the first time in centuries, prostitutes took control of their industry, their safety, and their earnings.

Betty Maybe is a sex worker and organizer with the Minneapolis Sex Workers Outreach Project, a group of sex workers turned activists. She spent her “punk rock” college years dancing for an upscale club in Portland, making \$100 a night to start. It was good money for a working-class student.

She’s long leveraged her sex appeal for money and gifts, never buying her own drinks at the bar, and never gambling her own cash at the casino. No matter where she goes, Betty boasts, she can find a man willing to hand over a \$20.

Some think it’s easy money. She calls it honed skill. Family and friends wrestle to understand, but she finds no shame in playing the cards life dealt.

“We will always exchange what we have for financial gain. What we have is the power of our sexuality. It will always be what we trade.”


The internet has only increased the power of women like Betty. She points to New Orleans’ Bourbon Street, which she visits often. Amid rows of strip clubs and tourist traps teeming with escorts, the pimps are the ones struggling, she says. The internet has turned them from bullwhip to beggar.

“They’re really desperate. Lately when I’ve gone down there, they’re giving me weed. They’re like, ‘I can do this, that, for you ... I can buy clothes for you.’ Begging people to come work for them, like they’ve become irrelevant with these kinds of tools.”

She has no need for anything a pimp proffers. But the new laws threaten to reverse that dynamic.

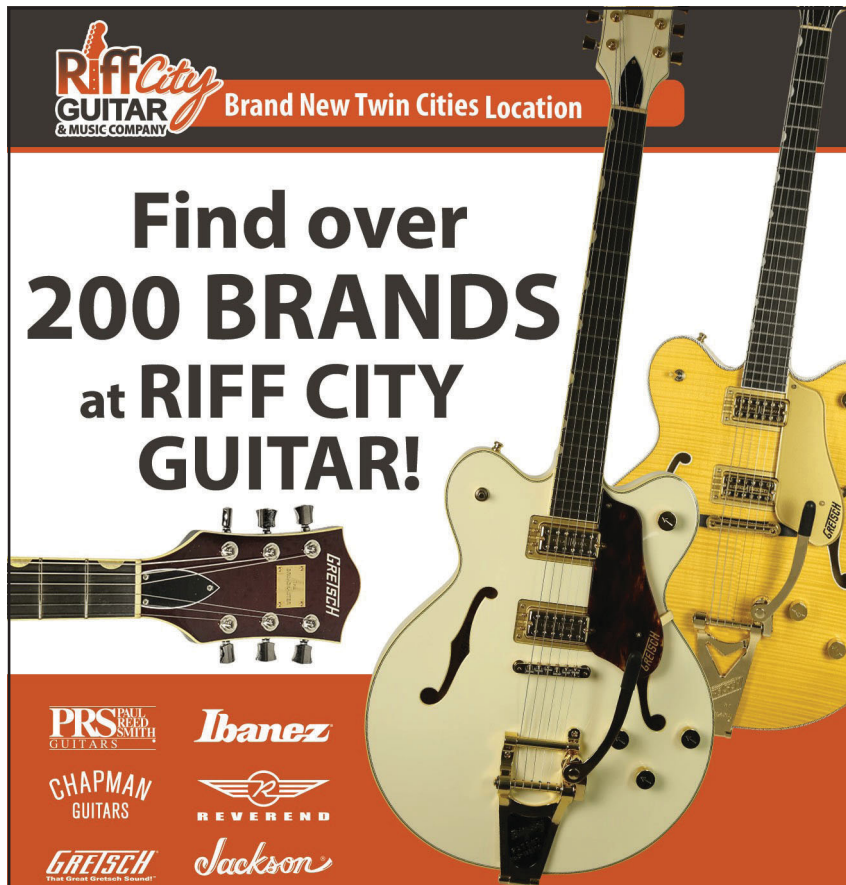
By killing the sites sex workers used to advertise, Congress is pushing them from the safety of their own homes back to the street. Most practicing today have never known a time before the internet. Now they’re fumbling to adapt to a resurrected dark age.



Pearl dipped her toe into the escort business five years ago. She’d seen a *Dr. Phil* episode featuring sugar baby websites like Seeking Arrangement, which matched college students with rich benefactors. The women on the show appeared happy, healthy, and in charge of their own choices, albeit somewhat alienated by their families.







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She chose to try it. Though she'd heard claims that escorts sold their souls, Pearl found nothing of the sort, she says sincerely.

"I never cried. I never felt bad about myself. If anything, I felt empowered."

Still, the stigma prevented her from telling friends and family. The sex workers on Twitter became her tribe. They showed her how to charge appropriately and background-check johns. They relied on each other in emergencies. And when Pearl eventually tired of sugar daddy dating, they helped her transition to selling porn and Skype sessions.

cigarette and scrolls nervously through her Twitter analytics. This time last year, she averaged more than 100,000 profile visits a month. Now it's down to 1,000. It worries her.

A submissive would usually find Salem's dominatrix site through Twitter or ad boards, where he's greeted with a catalog of ironclad prerequisites. From there, they cultivate a dominant-submissive dynamic through encrypted email, while Salem gauges the legitimacy of his interest and experience with BDSM. If he seems like a "good boy," she arranges a coffee meet

**"I NEVER FELT BAD
ABOUT MYSELF. IF ANYTHING,
I FELT EMPOWERED."**

But in the months leading up to Congress' action, Twitter preemptively rendered sex workers' accounts unsearchable, forcing them into isolation. In its attempt to save the damsels, legislators inadvertently left them in greater peril.

It's easy to trace how it all came about. Over the years, anti-prostitution activists realized their cause had lost its luster, says Jayne, a Sex Workers Outreach Project researcher. So they changed the vernacular, lumping the entire industry under the umbrella of "sex trafficking," whether it involved a teenage runaway or a mother of three earning a comfortable middle-class income.

Politicians from Sen. Amy Klobuchar to Rep. Erik Paulsen were quick to leap aboard. It was the perfect issue to champion. They got to play the role of crusading savior, and there was no pro-sex trafficking lobby waiting to fire back. Lost was any nuance.

The resulting laws became a rescue of the few that endangered the many. (Neither Klobuchar nor Paulsen responded to interview requests.)

"All sex workers can agree that sex trafficking and underage sex work is a serious problem," Pearl says. "None of us want that.... It's just really hard for me to see that [FOSTA-SESTA] are actually targeting sex trafficking when they're shutting down these sites that are by and large all used by consensual sex workers."

III. THE PURITAN BACKLASH

In a house near Powderhorn Park, Mistress Salem wakes every morning to a raft of emails from prospective clients.

Perched on her bed in an old T-shirt and Chinese silk trousers, she lights a

in public. The submissive brings a cash tribute. They go shopping for a collar. Ultimately, she may invite him to her dungeon.

Her favorite client comes to her home and pays thousands of dollars to worship her feet.

"This is the first time that I've ever felt like the world is actually, literally at my fingertips," Salem says. "I feel valued. And also just as a person who really enjoys fetish and BDSM, my job isn't a job. All of it is exciting and explorative. I'm evolving and learning. I feel extremely blessed."

Salem works closely with another dominatrix, Miss Bat, a sunny, tattooed Vampira with harajuku bangs. In search of alternatives to a grueling restaurant career, Bat found herself starting off in cam rooms, performing strip teasers for subscribers.

Customers' heckling and haggling soon wore her patience, so she moved to shooting her own videos.

Salem eventually helped Bat find her niche—bossing apron-robed submissives as they clean her floor on their hands and knees.

The rest of the time, their work grind is the same as any freelance gig. They promote themselves on social media, create content for seven porn sites each, and learn new methods of safe bondage play. Minneapolis' fetish scene is nothing to brag about, so they also tour conventions and dungeons across the country to meet subs who find them through their internet personas.

"I work a lot, but I'm happy and I wouldn't have it any other way," Bat says. "Seriously, every single sex worker that I've talked to in this line of work has been enthusiastic about sex work."

There's no intercourse involved, so Salem and Bat's work is legal. Still, they rely on verification sites for meeting new

clients, and online payment processors to collect money. Under FOSTA-SESTA, many of those tools are disappearing because they could be used to facilitate sex trafficking.

If the blackout spreads, it would cost them thousands of dollars a month, which leaves the new laws feeling like a puritanical attack on an entire culture of adults with unorthodox tastes.

Take the popular U.K. ad board AdultWork, which abruptly pulled its American listings in April.

“No doubt you will be up to speed with the news regarding SESTA and FOSTA,” read the email blast. “The legal advice we have received is that until such time as the position is clearer, we are to suspend all advertisements on AdultWork.com, regardless of what services are actually being advertised.”

AdultWork was Salem’s main revenue stream. European clients tend to behave better and pay more because they’re accustomed to legal and regulated prostitution, she says.

Its closure was crushing enough to make her consider exploring legally gray territory: strap-ons. If a pushy prospective client absolutely begged to meet up for a pegging session before she had sufficient time to screen him, could she afford to lose his business?

Bat helps harden her resolve against indulging that risk, Salem says. But still, the offers tempt.

IV.

A DISORDERLY HOUSE

In conjunction with the passage of FOSTA-SESTA, the Justice Department arrested half a dozen principals of Backpage.com on 93 counts of conspiracy to facilitate prostitution. Those indicted include James Larkin and Michael Lacey, former owners of Village Voice Media, which sold City Pages in 2015.

The federal indictment was a public flogging. The Justice Department accused Backpage of scrubbing ads alluding to child sex with less incriminating revisions. Though its owners claimed to have done everything they could to alert authorities of potential exploitation, internal emails revealed managers buried cases for fear of agitating anti-trafficking advocates. (Backpage attorney Liz McDougall did not respond for comment.)

When survivors of sex trafficking wrote to Congress, they implored lawmakers to correct the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which gave websites immunity from crimes committed by their users.

Yet what Congress chose to hear and repeat with righteous abandon was that ad sites increased sex trafficking by 840 percent—a claim without evidence.

There are no reliable statistics on trafficking. What the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children found was an increase in reports of missing people who had only resurfaced because they could be linked to an internet ad.

It’s impossible to tell if the spike was due to increased trafficking, increased police efforts, or the ease of finding victims now advertised above ground.

Backpage was law enforcement’s primary tool for conducting rescue missions and stings on buyers of underage sex. Over the last three years, every Hennepin County news release announcing sex trafficking charges described officers using the internet as a door. In 2017, Minnesota reported 173 sex trafficking offenses, which include cases involving true victims as well those in which officers fabricated ads to trap johns.

It’s clear that internet advertising led to a corresponding spike in police interest. The Washington County Attorney’s Office didn’t prosecute trafficking cases prior to 2015. Prosecutor Imran Ali says it was the internet that made the problem apparent.

Washington hired an analyst to trawl through hundreds of ads, flagging pictures of women who looked eerily young, or who bore bruises or track marks—an indication of drugs used as a method of control. Sometimes a reverse image search for the source of a photo could turn up a Facebook profile, and in turn unmask a pimp.

Investigators would try to separate the voluntary from the involuntary in a sea of transactions, a task complicated when



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victims form bonds with traffickers and refuse rescue.

"Backpage is shut down, but the demand is never going to go away," predicts Woodbury Police Detective Paul Kroshus. "There's going to be a state of discombobulation where the buyers are trying to find the sellers and the sellers are trying to find the buyers, but something's going to replace it. Unfortunately, it's probably going to be somewhere out of the country, and it's not going to comply with our subpoenas."

Backpage's demise will force investigators—as well as the families of the missing—to work harder and smarter.

Ahead of the SESTA vote, the U.S. Department of Justice warned Congress that the bill was broader than necessary, since it extended to cases of "minimal federal interest"—sexual transactions between consenting adults. There was also the constitutional concern that SESTA's retroactive reach could penalize websites for a wide range of activities that were legal prior to the bill's passage.

Just as the Justice Department predicted, internet censorship in the aftermath has reached into the lives of people who have nothing to do with the online sex trade.

Craigslist recently discontinued its entire personals section, which had helped millions of Americans find partners. Reddit shut down several sex-related subreddits. Google deleted Drive content of sex workers' rights advocacy groups. Microsoft products such as Xbox and Skype have banned nudity, and may now moderate the virtual bedrooms of long-distance couples.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation's experts warn that small internet startups, dating apps, and model listings will proactively cease operations to avoid the potential avalanche of lawsuits. After all, it's no secret that sex sellers and buyers find each other through largely vanilla tools like Tinder and Instagram.

"Online platforms are the modern town square," says EFF's Cindy Cohn. "Shifting more liability to internet platforms for their users' speech will inevitably lead to those platforms more tightly monitoring and restricting users' activities."

V. BROKEN AND BRAINWASHED

There's a philosophical evolution underway in law enforcement that reimagines prostitutes not as public nuisances, but victims. Police still arrest sex workers, but they now view them as vulnerable people who have fallen prey to poverty and all the ugly choices that come with it.

It's a cosmology insisted upon by the crackdown's most fervent supporters: politicians, the religious right, and con-

servative feminists who equate all pornography with exploitation, all prostitution with human trafficking. There's no place in this worldview for women who willingly choose this life.

The cheerleaders dismiss the so-called "happy hooker" narrative as a fantasy, a concoction from mentally broken and chemically dependent victims.

Breaking Free is a Twin Cities outreach group that provides food, shelter, and other resources for women seeking alternatives. It's funded by a host of religious groups, and its organizers are blunt in their belief that consent means nothing in the context of trading sex.

"We're elated that Backpage has been shut down," says Breaking Free's Lori Paul. "What we see is this is the first step in many to reduce the facilitators of sex trafficking, also known as prostitution."

The nonprofit's clientele are women who may have been charged with crimes or suffered violence. They come recommended by police, hospital staff, and outreach workers who find them in the streets, reluctantly selling sex to survive.

"Those who are saying this is consensual, something has happened to them where they have lost the truth of their real identity, where all they see themselves as is an object," Paul asserts. "That is not what this child was born for. That's not what this child was meant to grow up to do."

Last year Breaking Free claims to have served 350 "sex trafficking victims," which includes everyone who stopped in for financial aid.

But few of these activists communicate with their foils in the voluntary sex trade. The latter faction is championed by the Minneapolis Sex Workers Outreach Project, which seeks to debunk the myth that enthusiastic escorts and trafficked slaves are one and the same.

"The idea that everyone working on the street is exploited, and we can help them by supporting something that reduces their income, is not thinking big-picture about the drivers that lead a person to entering the sex trade," says Sabrina, a sex worker rights activist.

Sex work can be spurred by a host of motives: flexible and lucrative employment. A chance to leave behind the poverty of minimum wage. A way to circumvent disabilities that preclude working 9-5. A shot at building a nest egg for college.

Some of the most vulnerable sex workers aren't trafficked, but they may not have true choice either, Sabrina says. What they need are the same things that everyone needs: health care, daycare, and living wages.

Since Congress' actions, these panicked workers have been coming to the Outreach Project for groceries, diapers, rent money, and help in looking after each other's safety.

"The best thing allies can do is put money into that support fund," says Sabrina. "The first thing is taking care of our people and

“BACKPAGE’S REPLACEMENT IS PROBABLY GOING TO BE OUT OF THE COUNTRY, AND IT’S NOT GOING TO COMPLY WITH OUR SUBPOENAS.”

making sure everyone can at least keep their expenses covered, because a lot of workers are not going to have the privilege to stop doing sex work.”

Feminists on both ends share the same goals of fighting slavery and helping those who want to exit the life do so. Yet they clash as to whether trading sex is inherently immoral or degrading.

And in the end, everyone acknowledges that there’s no end in sight for the world’s oldest profession.

VI. WORKING WOMEN

On the first sunbaked Sunday in April, Jessica and Amber are dressed in spring florals and sipping cold brews at the Spyhouse Coffee in Uptown. They’re fit women in their early 20s, chatting over the whirl of bean grinders about giving a go at freestyling—picking up johns in restaurants and bars.

Neither has done it before. They’re unfamiliar with the protocol. And they worry that veterans with these pre-internet skills will withhold advice for fear of getting pinched for facilitation or promotion. Still, the women feel pressure to learn.

“It would be the only way, aside from working in a strip club environment,” Amber explains.

Both formerly worked as strippers. Industry standards demanded they tithe so much of their nightly income to DJs, bouncers, and managers that they typically walked away with just 60 percent of what they generated. There were no benefits.

Since they moved to escorting, they work whenever they like, serve clients of their own choosing, and pocket every dollar they earn. The way they see it, they’d rather rent their conversation and companionship than wear their bodies down building someone else’s fortune.

“In terms of selling yourself, everyone is selling themselves,” Amber says. “It’s just the difference between \$8 an hour and \$500 an hour. You’re taking time away from your dreams working for somebody else’s dreams. Eight hours a day, five days a week—think about everything you could be doing for yourself in that time. I consider that selling yourself.”

They’ve never been arrested or assaulted. They say trading in sex has afforded them freedom and comfort.

What they want the public to understand is that independence doesn’t necessarily come with power. American prostitution is illegal everywhere but a few counties in Nevada, and even the wealthiest of sex workers are reluctant to turn to police in instances of theft or violence. With no political capital, their very existence is all the easier to deny. Policies like FOSTA-SESTA are passed entirely without their input.

Sex workers aren’t the only ones who have noticed an industry in turmoil. The new laws have emboldened some clients to haggle more aggressively, thinking a desperate escort will now accept anything dangled before her, Amber says.

Pimps, attuned to the heightened anxiety, are hounding Jessica over Instagram with unwanted business offers.

“There’s always something in the message alluding to these bills that have just passed. ‘Now you need me,’” she says. “It’s really creepy, because that exact thing is what the people who passed the bill thought they were fighting, and they’ve brought it into my life. It was like a non-factor before.”

In 2016, Amnesty International called for global legalization of prostitution to protect sex workers from human- and labor rights abuses. Jessica and Amber agree it’s the only way to humanize working women and clients alike.

Their johns are usually married men with withered sex lives, or widowers with no one else to turn to. Sometimes awkward, somewhat weird, and almost compulsorily lonely, they’re not monsters, Jessica says. She considers holding space for them not only a victimless crime, but purposeful work.

She knows it’s not easy for the public to see the world through her eyes. What bothers her is that no one in a true position of power seems willing to listen to the legions of sex workers who feel the way she does.

“That’s what alarms me about anti-sex work policy. It’s like people are reaching across the aisle at our detriment. It disturbs me that wherever people lie on the political spectrum, they can unite against sex workers.”

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MORTIMORE'S

The reborn Lyndale dive is giving two-for-one a whole new meaning

BY EMILY CASSEL

It's a quiet Tuesday at Franklin and Lyndale. Inside the brick walls of the dive on the corner, a half-dozen guys sit around the bar, silently nursing bottles of beer and glancing alternately from their phones to the Twins coverage on a flat-screen. A couple walks in, past a wall of winking pinball machines that's currently going utterly ignored, and snag stools before ordering a pair of Coronas each. Almost everyone is wearing a baseball cap.

In other words? This is your standard weekday afternoon at Mortimer's.

Only when your eyes adjust from the sun do the changes to the 40-year-old bar become apparent. Did that guy just pay with a credit card? How many times have you seen a sober-seeming person ordering solid food here? Weren't there four foosball tables instead of three? Weren't they in way worse shape? And, am I losing it, or—no, that wall definitely wasn't there before.

Those differences are thanks to Jasha Johnston and Carrie McCabe-Johnston—the couple behind the nearby new-American restaurant Nightingale—who announced they were buying the Whittier staple last year. They planned to revitalize the building and redesign the menu with chef Carrie's craft touch. Ah, and there would be one other very significant update.

"Right away, we wanted to turn it into a music venue," Carrie says. It was a matter of timing: Uptown's Dulono's had suddenly shuttered not long before; the Triple Rock's closure late last year, while less abrupt, sent proportionally greater shockwaves through a community of musicians already hungry for places to play. Ergo, the wall, which splits Mortimer's traditional, pinball and foosball and drinking-to-get-drunk side from the restaurant-and-live-music room.

"We figured, Mortimer's has always been about the two-for-one—we'll kind of keep that space as it's always been, a neighborhood drinking bar, and have music over here," adds Jasha, seated across from Carrie in one of the U-shaped, sparkling-gold booths lining their new venue.

It's a risk. But if anyone could bring Mortimer's back to life, it's these two, who met when they were undergrads at Augsburg College. It was Carrie's dad, a longtime bartender-slash-manager at Mortimer's, who hired Jasha to tend bar at a tender 21. He's been there for the two decades since.

"It's kind of always been a part of our lives," Carrie says. "Jasha knew, even before it was an idea of us taking over, exactly what the place needed to be better, or to become more of a place for a wider audience."

Carrie knew too, of course. Her dad even tried to buy the bar once; the owners just weren't ready to

sell. She and Jasha may be behind Nightingale and the shiny new Tilt Pinball Bar, but they love a good dive. (They also bought Dusty's in Northeast last year—though they've left that purchase virtually unchanged.) So, she gets this place: "It's a drinking bar," she says. And that means a menu chock-full of burgers and BLTs, pork chops and tater tots.

No dish better captures the old-meets-new, bar-food-but-better vibe as succinctly as the Fried Fish Sammie (\$11). A homemade riff on the Mickey D's Filet-O-Fish, the sammie sammiches a substantial square of Alaskan cod and salt cod between a no-frills bun, a dollop of jalapeño tartar sauce spicing things up ever so slightly. With yellow American cheese and shredded lettuce, it even looks like the McDonald's version—only bigger—and it's the kind of perfect sandwich that has us hoping Twin Cities chefs someday tire of their pursuit for the ultimate burger and switch to gussying up this fast-food classic instead.

Elsewhere on the fried side, you'll find a number of vegetarian dishes on the new Mortimer's menu: the lightly crispy Buffalo cauliflower (\$7), the sourdough onion rings (\$6) with a tangy, lacy batter making them unlike just about every onion ring you've ever had. And almost everything that hits the fryers is gluten-free, something Carrie says she's seen more people at Nightingale asking for and something that isn't easy to find, bar-food-wise.

It's not all batter and bread. For example, did you ever think you'd order a salad here? You should—the chop salad (\$10), which finds strips of sopressata and provolone

partying with roasted red peppers, chick-peas, green olives, and romaine, generously dressed in oregano vinaigrette.

There are holdovers: Mortimer's always had a pretty solid bar pizza, which remains on the menu with minimal cheffing-up. The spicy wings have stuck around (and are 50 cents each on Wednesday wing night). Mercifully, the classic coney (\$7 or two for \$10) is still available, the dog a little bit meatier this time around.

"I just thought about what I would want to eat when I'm at a bar like Mortimer's," Carrie explains.

"I think that some people were a little bit worried that Carrie was gonna Nightingale Mortimer's up a little bit too much," adds Jasha, "and it seems like she's struck the perfect note."

In keeping with the old-school, neighborhood-bar vibe, Mortimer's serves up daily dinner specials. Half-priced apps are available on Mondays. On taco Tuesdays, get two street-style tacos for \$6. A coney dog with chips can be yours for just three bucks on Thursdays. Sundays? Those are for carbo-loading with bottomless spaghetti. (No sharing—they've been burned by a guy with multiple forks before.) And the deals start at 4 p.m., which means there's a blissful two-hour window in which you can pair your discounted meal with two-for-one drinks—they're still available seven days a week from open to 6 p.m.

Here's something else: You can bring the family. It's a distinct departure from the Mortimer's of old, where kids were explicitly not allowed. Ever. "Including ours," Carrie quips.

She says it's all about making Mortimer's a more accessible place, one where regulars still belly up to the bar, but new neighbors can drop in without feeling as unwelcome as a fly in a pint glass. "We live in this neighborhood, and we have for going on 16 years now. We love the nostalgia of those places and to be able to have those institutions, but then a lot of times, those institutions just end up becoming, like, museums for people that want them to stay the same."

So they've updated. They take cards. They have live music. They'll let your kids in. If you forget every word preceding this, you can look up the info via Facebook or their website—two decades after everyone's mom got online, Mortimer's finally did, too.

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But plenty hasn't changed at all. On a recent Thursday night, Kathy's still behind the bar, as she has been for about a quarter-century. Two guys step up to the pinball machines, holstering their beers in the cupholders before depositing coins; a woman perched on a stool with a bottle of Budweiser is politely declining a series of escalating drink offers from the man two stools down. One quarreling couple get up from their booth, briefly drawing everyone's attention as they make for the door. Children might be allowed these days; there aren't any in sight.

In other words?

This is your standard weekday evening at Mortimer's. **EF**



Fried Fish Sammie

ALMA GUZMAN

A LIST

FRIDAY Art-A-Whirl spins through Northeast **P. 17**

SATURDAY Luau party with dogs at Psycho Suzi's **P. 20**

SUNDAY Linden Hills celebrates spring **P. 21**

WEDNESDAY 5.16

COMEDY

MICK FOLEY: 20 YEARS OF HELL

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Twenty years ago, wrestling nerds all over the world lost their collective shit when WWE Superstars' Mick Foley, a.k.a. Mankind, was tossed off a steel cage 20 feet in the air, sending his body crashing through a table below. Miraculously, Foley got up and continued to battle with the legendary Undertaker for several more minutes; he was eventually thrown through the cage's ceiling onto a bed spiked with thumbtacks before mercifully being pinned. While the match itself was only around 15 minutes long, the legend has lived on for the past two decades. Now Foley is bringing his one-man show, 20 Years of Hell, around the country, reliving that epic evening with fans who are still talking about his gutsy performance to this day. Foley is no stranger to storytelling, having written several best-selling books about his career. He's also been touring comedy clubs for several years, sharing his insane, grotesque, and hilarious true tales. Unlike past shows, this event will focus specifically on a single night of his career, but he'll also be inviting fans to ask questions about anything—in or out of the ring. 15+. 7 p.m. Sold out. 408 E. Broadway, Mall of America, Bloomington; 952-858-8558. —PATRICK STRAIT

BOOKS

LITERARY DEATH MATCH

NOMAD WORLD PUB

Literary Death Match is back in town for a night of beer, books, and lit battles. The premise is simple: a handful of authors read from new works, which are then judged by a panel of peers. Along the way there are performances, witticisms, and pints. The judges for this installment are comedian Brandi Brown, news anchor Jana Shortal, science whiz Maggie Ryan, and Steph Opitz, who is organizing the Loft's new Wordplay festival. Brave



Kate Iverson and Denny Park are blue at Art-A-Whirl.

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wordsmiths reading this evening include Patrick Nathan (*Some Hell*), poet Su Hwang, award-winning author Jeanne Lutz, and renaissance man Khary Jackson (he's a poet, teacher, playwright, actor, and dancer). Find tickets at www.literarydeathmatch.com. 6:30 p.m. \$8/\$12 at the door. 501 Cedar Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-338-6424. —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

COMEDY

SHANE MAUSS

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Comedy fans in the Twin Cities may know Shane Mauss for his interest in mind-altering drugs. "I had a show that became successful about psychedelics, and people turned out

to be very interested in the subject matter," he says. The tour, called Good Trip, traveled to 111 cities. But talking about psychedelics is really just a jumping-off point for Mauss to discuss psychology and consciousness. His podcast, *Here We Are*, also informs his standup set. "I interview a lot of neuroscientists, psychologists, and behavioral economists, and then I kind of work some of that stuff into my act." These days, Mauss is exploring the meaning of life. "I really like to talk about some of our subconscious decision-making," he notes. "I'm also bipolar, and have been writing material about that recently." 18+. 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. \$15-\$18.

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THURSDAY 5.17

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Dancers Alejandra Iannone and Rick Ausland (Buckets and Tap Shoes) have long teamed up as Sparkle Theatricals to present innovative, delightful concoctions that transport viewers out of their comfort zones and into worlds of magic. Their newest production, *The Room with Closets*, is based on a book by Iannone's father, A. Pablo Iannone, a professor of philosophy.

The Arb installs origami-inspired sculpture.



JASON BOUDREAU-LANDIS

The work journeys between the U.S. and Argentina, dream-like worlds and grim realities, and art and politics as myriad characters (a newlywed, a shepherd, a father, a physics student) navigate life, death, relationships, and their place in the world. Directed by Jon Ferguson (who has done award-winning work for Live Action Set, the Guthrie, and Open Eye Figure Theater), the work promises to be informed and enlightening. 7 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, Monday; 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 4 p.m. Sunday. \$20/\$24 at the door; \$12 students and seniors. 1420 Washington Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-326-1811.

Through May 26 —CAMILLE LEFEVRE

ART

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This monumental outdoor sculpture exhibition captures the delicate paper-folding artform of origami, and then blows it up to a giant size rendered in metal. "Origami in the Garden" includes 25 displays of 40 sculptures crafted in bronze, aluminum, and steel by Santa Fe artists Kevin and Jennifer Box. Cranes, bison, horses, butterflies, and other animals are occupying the lawns and garden. Inside the visitors' center are two related exhibitions. "Inside Out" showcases 24 artworks, including six unfolding wall hangings, six cast maquettes, six origami paper models, and six crease-pattern wall hangings. "Harmony with Nature" is an exhibition featuring works by local artists inspired by Japanese art. There will be an opening reception on Thursday, May 17, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Free with gate admission; the opening reception is \$5-\$20. 3675 Arboretum Dr., Chaska; 952-443-1400.

Through October 21 —CAMILLE LEFEVRE

FRIDAY 5.18

ART/FESTIVAL

ART-A-WHIRL 2018

NORTHEAST MINNEAPOLIS

Springtime tradition Art-A-Whirl marks its 23rd year with an eclectic showcase of more than 650 artists working in virtually every conceivable medium. Billed as the largest open studio tour in the country, Art-A-Whirl has expanded into nearly every corner of the neighborhood, as crowds rove among 50-plus locations, including warehouses, studios, galleries, and garages. Visitors are encouraged to strike up conversations with the artists, stroll through installations, watch live demonstrations, and participate in hands-on workshops. Patrons who purchase items will be acknowledged with an "I Bought Art" sticker, conferring special discounts at a number of neighborhood businesses. With a wide array of food vendors and live music hosted at nearby breweries and bars, Art-A-Whirl might have developed a carnivalesque sprawl, but downloading the Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association (NEMAA) app can help visitors can add a little structure to their plans. Find more info and locations at nemaa.org/art-a-whirl. 5 to 10 p.m. Friday; noon to 8 p.m. Saturday; noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Free.

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

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FT. REAL ESTATE WITH HABIBI, FLAMIN' OH'S, LAST IMPORT, ROY FREEDOM
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JUN 15 **FRANCIS AND THE LIGHTS**

JUN 16 **DRAKE NITE: SCORPION**
WITH DJ BACH, GREENERY

JUN 22 89.3 THE CURRENT AND RED BULL PRESENT
GROWN & SEXY PRIDE VIII
FT. DJ SHANNON BLOWTORCH AND SWEETPEA WITH DYKES DO DRAG, THE VIGILANTEASE COLLECTIVE, AND MORE

JUN 23 **FLIP PHONE: XXL PRIDE**
STARRING MONET X CHANGE (RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE) WITH CEE CEE RUSSELL, JULIA STARR, TYGRA SLARII, DOMITA SANCHEZ

JUN 25 **CHROMEO**
WITH POMO

JUN 29 **THE FRONT BOTTOMS**
WITH KEVIN DEVINE (SOLO ACOUSTIC)

JUN 30 DARK ENERGY PRESENTS
THE 2ND ANNUAL VAMPIRE'S BALL
WITH THE PIRATE TWINS, DJ GRANT MAYLAND, ANGELICA OTTAVIA, DJ MERCURY, HYPERKARMA, DEVATA DAUN, AND MORE

JUL 07 **THE ENGLISH BEAT**

JUL 08 **STS9**
WITH WHITE CLIFFS

JUL 13 **REBEL, REBEL**
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JUL 14 **DADDY**
ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY

JUL 20 89.3 THE CURRENT PRESENTS
RAPHAEL SAADIQ
WITH ALI SHAHEED MUHAMMAD

JUL 29 **MELVINS**

SEP 05 **CAR SEAT HEADREST**
WITH NAKED GIANTS

SEP 08 **FOZZY**
THE JUDAS RISING TOUR WITH ADELITA'S WAY, STONE BROKEN, THE STIR

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JUL 25 **MY BLOODY VALENTINE**

AUG 01 **BEN HARPER & CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE**

AUG 11 **PUNCH BROTHERS**
W/ MADISON CUNNINGHAM

SEP 06 **NEKO CASE**
W/ THAO (of THE GET DOWN STAY DOWN)

SEP 21 **LEON BRIDGES**
W/ KHRUANGBIN
SECOND SHOW ADDED!

UP NEXT 7TH ST ENTRY

HINDS
W/ GOODBYE HONOLULU, TIGHTS
WEDNESDAY, MAY 16

ACTUAL WOLF
W/ FIELD DIVISION
THURSDAY, MAY 17

IZELL PYRAMID
W/ R.A.D. DUA, FALLS, DISTANCE DECAY
FRIDAY, MAY 18

FOREVER IN YOUR MIND
THE EUPHORIC EXPERIENCE
W/ DANA VAUGHNS
SATURDAY, MAY 19 (MATINEE)

UP NEXT TURF CLUB

CLAMS, KARATE CHOP, SILENCE, CHAMBER NOISE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 16

MIPSO
W/ THE LOWEST PAIR
THURSDAY, MAY 17

ARCWELDER
W/ ANNIE AND THE BANG BANG, RINGOUT!
FRIDAY, MAY 18

WYE OAK
W/ PALM
SATURDAY, MAY 19

UP NEXT OTHER VENUES

POWER TRIP
W/ SHEER MAG, FURY, RED DEATH
FINE LINE
SUNDAY, MAY 20

MASON JENNINGS
W/ SERA CAHOONE
THE CEDAR
FRI, MAY 25 & SAT, MAY 26

PARQUET COURTS
W/ GOAT GIRL
FINE LINE
THURSDAY, MAY 31

UP NEXT BEST CONCERT VENUE - CITY PAGES 2018

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SUNDAY, MAY 20

CHROME
W/ THE ROPE, WITCH WATCH
MONDAY, MAY 21

PARSONSFIELD
TUESDAY, MAY 22

RICHARD BUCKNER
W/ RYAN HOLWEGER
SUNDAY, MAY 20

CORB LUND
W/ SARAH STREITZ
TUESDAY, MAY 22

QUINTRONICS
WEATHER WARLOCK
W/ KPT, JEREMY YLVISAKER
WEDNESDAY, MAY 23

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A-LIST



BILL CAMERON

Mixtape returns with even more moves.

CONTINUED FROM FRIDAY ►

including house, breaking, and funkstyles. BIONIK has mixed together music to transition seamlessly between artists and dance styles. Al Taw'am, for example, a duo of 18-year-old twin sisters Iman and Khadijah Siferllah-Griffin, will explore connections between African dance and hip-hop. Joelle Fernandez and her crew will perform a work about the empowerment of Asian and Pacific Islander women. Also performing are Darrius Strong, Johnson III, and J-Sun. 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday. \$22-\$25. 528 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis; 612-206-3636.

Through Sunday — CAMILLE LEFEVRE

SATURDAY 5.19

PARTY

THE ROYAL WEDDING

BRIT'S PUB & EATING ESTABLISHMENT

Anglophiles rejoice: There's a new royal wedding to swoon over, and Brit's Pub is streaming the event in all of its glory. Oh, the hats! The tiaras! The stiff upper lips! There will be much to see, including celebrity guests, excessive pomp, a gorgeous chapel, and carriage processions as Meghan Markle marries Prince Harry and becomes Her Royal Highness Princess Henry of Wales. Oh, did we mention it starts at 6 a.m.? Doors open at 5 a.m. So get some beauty rest the night before. Brit's will have big-screen projectors and 80-inch HDTVs at the ready with surround sound for your wedding-watching pleasure. There

will be complimentary wedding cake, breakfast available on the menu, and drinks starting at 8 a.m. (thanks, pesky liquor statutes). Dress to impress, because of course there will be a photo wall for you to take selfies with your besties. 5 to 9 a.m. Free. 1110 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis; 612-332-3908. —SHEILA REGAN

BARHOPPING

SPRING OUTDOORS

LAKES & LEGENDS BREWING COMPANY

This Saturday, Lakes & Legends will be throwing a street party designed to get Minnesotans excited for camping and outdoor adventure season. That includes vendors and organizations that are psyched about biking, bird-watching, tiny-house camping, paddle boarding, climbing, canoeing, and kiteboarding. Chat with other sporty types, and grab a beer. Sustenance includes beer sausage and smoked pork sandwiches from Bleu Cuisine and tacos by Flagsmash. Live music will be provided by funksters Mikel Wright & the Wrongs and Americana group Margot. Dogs are welcome, so leash up your pleasant pup. Noon to 8 p.m. Free. 1368 Lasalle Ave., Minneapolis; 612-999-6020. —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

FESTIVAL

MSP COMICON 2018

MINNESOTA STATE FAIR GRANDSTAND

Wizard World Comic Con skipped town on us this year. Bummer. But hey, we've had the awesome and totally local MSP ComiCon all along. The biannual event is now in its 30th year, offering a day of friendly geekery open

SATURDAY

PARTY

ART-THOU-LUAW 2018

PSYCHO SUZI'S
MOTOR LOUNGE

This weekend, many bars and restaurants will be hosting parties in honor of Art-A-Whirl. However, few have the potential to be as cute as this event at Psycho Suzi's. The Puppy Pageant, now in its sixth year, is super adorable. Past contestants have included a canine Abe Lincoln, a "Pedal Pup" puppy, dogs in Hawaiian shirts, and lots of animals in tutus. Local comedian Maggie Faris will narrate the parade, and prizes will be awarded to the beasts with the best looks. Fun for humans includes a build-your-own Bloody Mary bar, pizza served by the slice, adoptable (and huggable) puppies, and a beer truck from Indeed Brewing Company. The music lineup features sets from the Rope, Blinds, Theology, the 99ers, and Black Widows, and an after-party with DJ Jake Rudh and DJ Shiek. 1 p.m. to 2 a.m. Free; \$3 pageant registration. 1900 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis; 612-788-9069. —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER



BLUIZ60

to all ages. There will be costume contests featuring incredible looks, from obscure references to iconic classics. There will be vendors with hard-to-find collectibles and comics. And there will be plenty of artists and comics creators. The lineup includes a wealth of local talent; some of the titles these creatives have worked on include *Star Wars*, *Teen Titans*, *Justice League Elite*, and *Green Arrow*, to name only a few. For tickets and more info, visit www.mcbacomicons.com. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. \$13-\$14 (bring a non-perishable food shelf item for \$1 off); kids 10 and under free. 1265 Snelling Ave. N., St. Paul; 651-288-4400. **Through Sunday** —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

SUNDAY 5.20

FESTIVAL

LINDEN HILLS FESTIVAL

LINDEN HILLS

Neighborhood street parties are a Minneapolis summertime tradition. This weekend, Linden Hills will be celebrating the 44th anniversary of the area's chill festival. Things kick off at 11 a.m. with a bike parade (come 30 minutes early if you'd like help decorating your ride). Grownups will appreciate the beer garden, while kids will have lots to see and do with live

music, games, bounce houses, and more. Grab some eats from food trucks and stands offering tasty treats from Tilia, Clancey's, Tinto, Drew's Donuts, and Sebastian Joe's. Other things to investigate include free yoga sessions, a farmers market, and a used book sale. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Free. 3100 W. 43rd St., Minneapolis. —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

TUESDAY 5.22

BOOKS

REX SORGATZ

FINNEGAN'S

Former Minneapolisian turned New Yorker Rex Sorgatz, founder of MNSpeak (RIP), was making listicles before that was even a thing, on his Fimoculous blog. Now he has a new book out. *The Encyclopedia of Misinformation* is a reference work all about fake news and untruths. With charts, illustrations, and Sorgatz's funny, insightful writing, the piece takes a journey through lies and deceptions from days of yore all the way to the present. Sorgatz is popping into Finnegan's for Mpls. St. Paul Magazine's Tastemakers event, where he'll be conversing with journalist Steve Marsh about media, truthiness, and pseudoscience. 7 p.m. Free; register at eventbrite.com. 817 Fifth Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-454-0615. —SHEILA REGAN



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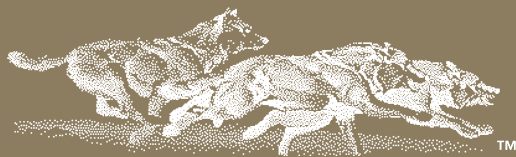
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DEAD END

Deadpool 2 paints the franchise into a corner



Ryan Reynolds

COURTESY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

BY TONY LIBERA

Nathan Rabin once wrote of *The Simpsons*, “In its god-like prime [the show] did not need to sacrifice laughs for heart or vice versa.” That’s a pretty spot-on assessment of the classics, but it also points to a big problem with the newer episodes: While the occasional joke may land, contemporary *Simpsons* lacks substance.

And that was pretty much the case with *Deadpool* the first time around. After years of trying to get the picture off the ground, Ryan Reynolds finally made our dreams come true—and the result was a sporadically funny entry into the superhero movie canon. While novelty made the original stand out, *Deadpool 2* doesn’t have that to fall back on.

This is where the so-called fanboys take to the comment section to assert that “Not every movie needs to be *Citizen Kane*!” and that this reviewer is a joyless dummy. And while I agree on both points, it’d be nice if every movie were at least somewhat good. It says a lot about *Deadpool 2* that the mid-end credit scenes are the best part of the movie.

The sequel picks up with our antihero taking on international merc jobs, killing bad guys, and having fun doing it. To avoid spoilers, let’s just say some bad stuff goes down, and by roundabout means Deadpool finds himself protecting a young mutant named Russell, aka Firefist (Julian Dennison), from future-badass/murder machine Cable (Josh Brolin).

To the filmmakers’ collective credit, there is an attempt at gravity this go-around. Deadpool feels guilty about a particular death, and his arc with Russell at least aims for meatiness. That said, it never really works because the rest of the movie is such a chaotic mess.

As in the worst *X-Men* movies, there are too many characters who aren’t fully utilized, too many things happening that never culminate in any meaningful way. Motivations are farfetched enough to be jarring, and the humor isn’t strong enough for us to overlook story flaws.

There’s also this issue (present in the *Deadpool* comics over the past few years as well) where every character takes on Deadpool’s personality traits through weird osmosis or bad character writing. Be it

DEADPOOL 2

directed by David Leitch
now open, area theaters

Cable, Russell, or a certain mystery bad guy, everybody seems just a bit too similar and out of line with their usual identities.

This, along with some plot points, paints future *Deadpool* movies and potentially some of the *X-Men* movies into a bit of a corner. Cable and other characters in *Deadpool 2* are pretty big components of the *X-Men* mythology, and here they’re reduced to caricatures.

As a longtime fan of the comic book character (I still have my original issue of 1997’s *Deadpool* #1), I really want to like this franchise. But it’s just so meh. Ryan Reynolds is the perfect person to play Deadpool and he’s been carrying these movies. Why can’t the powers that be figure out a decent script to complement him?

Chances are that if you absolutely loved the first *Deadpool*, you’ll at least like *Deadpool 2*. As for the rest of us, let’s keep our fingers crossed for a *Deadpool* movie that actually works. **CF**

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HOPE DIES LAST

Speechless has a lot to say about grief and healing



ANNIE GALLOWAY

BY JAY GABLER

Why aren't there more plays about grief? The ancient Greeks took it on, but with occasional exceptions—

David Lindsay-Abair's *Rabbit Hole*, for instance—playwrights today seem to think that grief is just a little too static for a satisfying evening at the theater.

In *Speechless*, the Moving Company addresses grief in a way you've never seen before, unless you happened to catch the inaugural run last fall. The artists have deepened and remounted the acclaimed piece.

Aptly staged in the cavernous box of the Lab Theater, *Speechless* presents us with five mourners: Heidi Bakke, Camille Chong, Yuanya Horstmann, Masanari Kawahara, Nathan Keepers, and Dominique Serrand. They open the show by breaking into tears, beginning a 75-minute journey into the light.

(Cast changes since 2017 include Serrand, rarely seen onstage in recent years, stepping in for Steven Epp, who's on Once-ler duty in the Children's Theatre's *Lorax*. Epp, Keepers, and Serrand are credited with conceiving the show, which was collaboratively created by the company.)

The title is not false advertising: The five performers do not speak, at least not in conventional language. As they go through the motions of receiving an urn, then sitting down to a funereal meal, the soundtrack is provided by contemplative music: Brahms, Elgar, Korngold, Schubert, Tchaikovsky. One of the many things that feels fresh about *Speechless* is that it's a performance set to classical music, with comedic elements

SPEECHLESS

The Lab Theater
700 N. First St., Minneapolis
612-333-7977; through June 10

where the music isn't the butt of the joke: It's in on it.

The comedy comes from the mourners' mishaps as they go about their rites: broken plates, burned potatoes. Serrand directs, and sustains a delicately balanced tone of laughter through tears, the way you smile when a funeral organist flubs a note.

Eventually it's time to clean up and move forward, and the process of mopping up the ashes (one convention *Speechless* does not defy is that cremains appearing onstage will inevitably spill) begins a series of magical developments leading to a transformation. The Moving Company has never been afraid to embrace the elements, and even evaporation becomes part of this show's magic.

Speechless is appealingly understated. These characters aren't demanding attention, they're asking for community. We don't know what's been lost, but we see what remains, and a heartwarming final sequence poetically suggests what might be reborn.

Well, we might have an inkling of what's been lost. In this near-wordless production, we do see one word: HOPE, written on a shroud draped beneath the urn and accompanied by a Statue of Liberty candle that keeps going out. *Speechless* may lead you to contemplate a personal loss, but it also indicates what, collectively, we can't afford to lose. **C**

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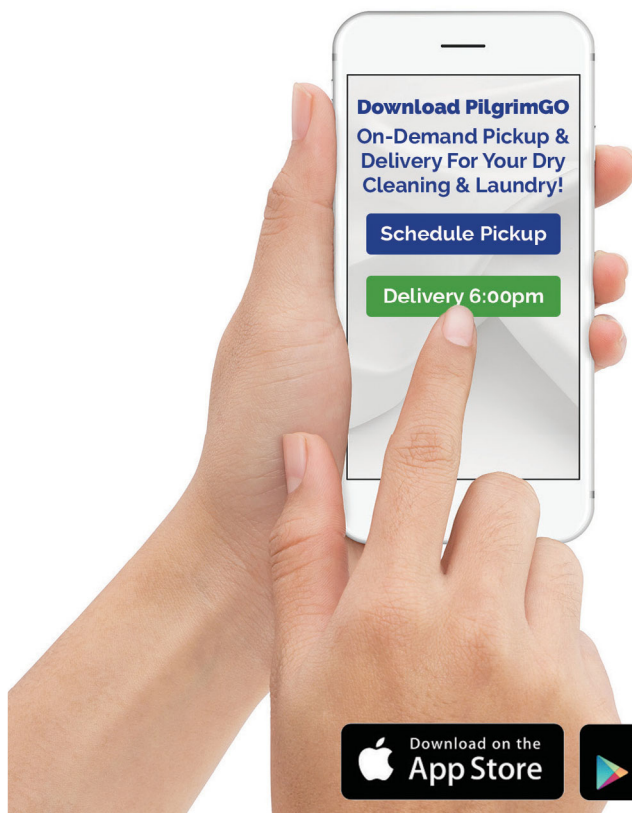
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STREET *Style*

MAY DAY! Sunshine, smiles, and style at the MayDay Festival on May 6. **BY ELLEN LAWSON**



EMMY LULU BELLE

31, PROFESSIONAL FUN-MAKER

What are you wearing?

Munro shoes, American Apparel pants, River Island top, thrifted umbrella.

Describe your style:

Pretty Woman meets *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*.

How has your style changed in the past couple years?

Becoming more comfortable letting my inner high-femme diva shine.

What community events are you looking forward to this summer?

Mondo Queer Beach Party, block parties, Queer Prom, farmers markets, drag brunches.



VANY CHHON

32, SEWING PROFESSIONAL

What are you wearing?

Hat, shoes, and sunglasses from Target, outfit from Forever21.

Describe your style:

Whimsical with Cambodian influence.

How has your style changed in the past couple years?

Since moving to the U.S. from Cambodia two years ago, my style has vastly changed because of the variety of stores and clothing.

What community events are you looking forward to this summer?

Grand Old Day, North St. Paul History Cruze Car Show, and of course the MN State Fair!



LISA GAMBIANA

33, INTERIOR DESIGNER

What are you wearing?

Hat from a Colombian street market, Ray-Ban sunglasses, ASOS jumpsuit, Birkenstock sandals, vintage purse.

Describe your style:

Anything that transitions from work to yardwork.

How has your style changed in the past couple years?

I've learned the value of Northeast Tailor Shop.

What community events are you looking forward to this summer?

Art-A-Whirl and anytime Night Moves plays.



CLAIRE RICHARDS

27, SERVER

What are you wearing?

Hat from TJ Maxx, Sienna Sky romper from Nordstrom Rack.

Describe your style:

Versatile. I enjoy vintage bohemian looks, especially in the spring and summer.

How has your style changed in the past couple years?

It hasn't changed much.

What community events are you looking forward to this summer?

Northern Spark, the all-night art festival that takes place in mid-June. It's a really fun time full of music, food, and art.

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First Avenue Presents
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Friday, May 18
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Doors 7pm • Show 8pm • All Ages

Saturday, May 19
The Cedar Presents **An evening with GRIFFIN HOUSE**
Doors 7pm • Show 8pm • All Ages • \$22 adv / \$25 dos

Thursday, May 24
The Cedar and KFAI Present
TANNAHILL WEAVERS
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Friday, May 25
First Avenue and 89.3 The Current Present
MASON JENNINGS
with Sera Cahoon (Night One)
Doors 7pm • Show 8pm • All Ages • Tickets \$30

Saturday, May 26
First Avenue and 89.3 The Current Present
MASON JENNINGS
with Sera Cahoon (Night Two)
Doors 7pm • Show 8pm • All Ages • Tickets \$30

Friday, June 1
The Cedar and Teatro del Pueblo Present
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FRIDAY, MAY 18

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Ayy Cee, MARGARET, The Trappistines, Alex Procto
9PM • \$6

SUNDAY, MAY 20

Serac, Vernon Wayne, Trita, HighGraves
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5/24 GOSH!, the Cult of Lip, Go For Retro, Material
5/25 . . . Minne / Bluntz, Hayden Fox, YYY
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5/30 Typesetter, Butchers Union, Mobina Galore, Contentious

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5/16 - BIG GEORGE JACKSON BLUES - #FREEMUSICWEDNESDAYS - 8pm
5/17 - DOSE & DINKS, BOOT R&B, CARNEGIES, & EXACTLY NO
5/18 - BECKY KAPEL & JAVIER MATOS - CD Release Show
5/19 - DRED I DREAD - Live At The Hook Album Release
5/20 - JOE DAVIS & POETIC DIASPORA - CD Release
5/23 - RED EYE RUBY - #FREEMUSICWEDNESDAYS - 8pm
5/24 - BIG FAT LOVE: 10th Annual John Prine Tribute
5/25 - PAUL CEBAR TOMORROW SOUND, The April Fools
5/30 - PAUL BERGEN & THE ASTRONAUTS OF RHYTHM & SOUND - FREE
6/01 - ANNIE FITZGERALD - Album Release Show
6/02 - THE SWEET COLLEAGUES, HOUNDS OF FINN, & SisterTree
6/06 - WILLIE MURPHY - #FREEMUSICWEDNESDAYS - 8pm
6/08 - RADDIA RADDIA, Jillian Rae, & Savannah Smith - Album Release
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MARY GIBNEY

SILLY LOVE SONGS

Becky Kapell brings a classic country sound into the present with *That Certain Ache*

BY JIM WALSH

“Love is silly,” Becky Kapell says to me one night at the 331 Club, as Dan Israel sings about that same silly subject on that well-worn northeast Minneapolis stage and thirtysomethings all around us dive in, put the brakes on, and maneuver through love and lust and all the stations in between. She says it with a who-gives-a-shit tilt of her head and the same matter-of-fact wisdom that informs the warm melancholia of her new record, *That Certain Ache*.

Miss Becky (to use the longtime moniker she’s only recently shelved) has dropped in to the 331 for a beer after band practice, and now here she is finishing up a story about love gone wrong, talking about how sure, good love can grow and bloom more good love, but yeah, because of everything it promises and puts us through, ain’t love silly?

“Did I say that?” she asks a few days later in the living room of her St. Paul home, which sits across the street from Como Park. “Frames of mind are like that. Which is what a song is, too. A song is just a moment in time. It’s not the answer to everything. But gosh, yes. I was talking about...”

Love. Heartache. Loss. Love, silly love. “Yeah, that,” she said. “The title track, ‘That Certain Ache,’ is super sad, a song about the loss of love, or the end of love—My

heart is missing that certain ache.’ I guess there are a couple breakup songs on there. There’s a song called ‘Say Goodbye’ that’s more rollicking and fun, but it’s a breakup song that I wrote at the beginning of my last relationship. And ‘Spend My Time’ is that idea that love that’s never quite realized is kind of a cool thing. There’s a lot of good things about a suspended love that can kind of just vibrate in that space.”

Produced, recorded, and mastered by Minnesota roots-rock all-stars Paul Bergen, Erik Koskinen, and Tom Garneau, *That Certain Ache* is the sound of an assured singer coming into her own, and Kapell likewise discusses the ups and downs of her life with nonchalant joy and midlife wisdom. Which brings us to another one of her favorite bar-chatter topics—the number seven.

“Every seven years is a different phase of life,” she says. “At seven, you’re in the middle of your carefree childhood, then seven years later when you’re 14, now you’re at the beginning of your angsty teens, and then at 21 you’re an adult. When I was 42 is when I got divorced and started playing the guitar, and I had fairly young kids and was a single mom. When I was 49, I was just a year away from being an empty nester, theoretically, and my music really

started moving forward, like, ‘This is a focus of mine.’ I’ll be 54 at the end of May, so when I’m 56...”

A native of Mahtomedi, Kapell sang in choir and messed around with banjo during short stints in college and while working in Wisconsin and California. In 1983, she was 19 and living on St. Paul’s East Side with her brother Dave (founder of Magnetic Poetry, which Becky now runs) at a “seriously depressing time” of her life when they got word Prince was making a movie. The brother-sister duo responded to a call for extras.

“They told us to look sad and stare at the microphone,” she recalls. “We’re in the movie during the song ‘Purple Rain.’ Shortly after that I met a guy and moved to Portland, and when the movie came out a couple of times I nonchalantly mentioned to people I was in *Purple Rain* and it cemented something. I was this girl from the Midwest. I was almost an instant celebrity in Portland.”

In Portland, she started singing with Oregon groove-rockers Ed and the Boats. She also got married and gave birth to her children, Sam and Maddy.

“With a couple of friends, I eventually started a country cover band. We played once a month at a tavern that is still there, that all my friends still play at. It’s when smoking was allowed in bars, there was smoke everywhere, we’d do four sets a night and I was married and I sang through both my pregnancies and it was great. My band was Becky and the Belly-Achers.

“That’s when I really started loving and learning country music. But I didn’t play an instrument, and I didn’t write songs. I just did old country cover songs that nobody ever really heard of before.”

The business side of Magnetic Poetry was ramping up, and Portland was growing too expensive, so in 1996 Kapell moved to the house she lives in today. In 2007, at 42, she started playing guitar and writing songs as she walked around Como Park, and five years later she traveled back to Portland to record her debut CD, *For Now*.

“I didn’t know anything about the music scene here, but I started going out,” she says. “I’d always keep three or four CDs in my purse and I’d meet someone and they’d go, ‘I’m a musician, too!’ and I’d go, ‘Well, here’s my CD!’ You know? I don’t know. I’ll tell you what, that was hard—just forcing yourself to go out. Maddy was in high school, and I had fun, but it was hard going out alone as a woman.”

Guitarist Bergen (Astronauts of Rhythm and Sound, Molly Maher and Her Disbelievers, and the Erik Koskinen Band) was one of the musicians who dug *For Now*.



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MUSIC

Kapell recruited him for her band and started playing regular gigs at the Dubliner Pub in St. Paul. Then, last year, "over lots of Jim Beam and lots of Paul smoking cigarettes at two in the morning," the two crafted *That Certain Ache* in Bergen's basement studio, with finishing touches at Koskinen's Realphonic Studios.

The result is a classic-country crooner record built around songs like "Capable Man," "Such a Fool," and "Hungry Dog" that recall the likes of Kitty Wells, Loretta Lynn, and Patsy Cline. Recorded with a slight but haunting slap-back echo, Kapell's voice is rich with the sort of longing that wouldn't sound out of place on any classic-country playlist. But don't pigeonhole her as an old-timey act.

"I love old country music, but—and I've talked to the Cactus Blossoms about this—I am not a retro artist," she says. "I'm definitely not trying to be like 'Da-der-da-der-da-der old-time country, I'm gonna wear my boots and big skirt.' I'm not doing that. For me, I love the harmony part of country music. I feel like my songs take turns that you might not expect, and for me it's all about the melody."

Not to mention silly love, silly heartbreak, and silly romance. **GF**

CRITICS' PICKS

JOEY BADASS

FIRST AVENUE, SATURDAY 5.19

Rapper Joey Bada\$\$ was just 17 when he broke through, dutifully dusting off '90s East Coast sounds for 2012's 1999 mixtape. But anyone who took him for a strict revivalist was mistaken. The Brooklynite has since found pop-rap success with his EDM-influenced "Devastated" and his writing on Post Malone's "Rockstar." Last year, Joey released his most well-rounded and impassioned project yet, the politically aware *All-Amerikkkan Bada\$\$*. With Boogie, Buddy, and Chuck Strangers. 18+. 8 p.m. \$25. 701 First Ave. N., Minneapolis; 612-338-8388.

—MICHAEL MADDEN

WYE OAK

TURF CLUB, SATURDAY 5.19

It's easy to take the Baltimore indie-rock duo Wye Oak for granted. Singer/guitarist Jenn Wasner and drummer/keyboardsist Andy Stack release a good-to-great new album every two or three years without much accompanying fanfare. With the euphoric, hooky dream-pop of their excellent new LP, *The Louder I Call, the Faster It Runs*, the band have finally made sure their presence is undeniably felt. *With Palm*. 21+. 8 p.m. \$17/\$20. 1601 University Ave., St. Paul; 651-647-0486. —MICHAEL MADDEN

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FREE WILL ASTROLOGY

>> By Rob Breznysy

♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19): According to my assessment of the astrological omens, your duty right now is to be a brave observer and fair-minded intermediary and honest storyteller. Your people need you to help them do the right thing. They require your influence in order to make good decisions. So if you encounter lazy communication, dispel it with your clear and concise speech. If you find that foggy thinking has started to infect important discussions, inject your clear and concise insights.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20): A chemist named Marcellus Gilmore Edson got a patent on peanut butter in 1894. A businessperson named George Bayle started selling peanut butter as a snack in 1894. In 1901, a genius named Julia David Chandler published the first recipe for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. In 1922, another pioneer came up with a new process for producing peanut butter that made it taste better and last longer. In 1928, two trailblazers invented loaves of sliced bread, setting the stage for the ascension of the peanut butter and jelly sandwich to its full glory. According to my analysis, Taurus, you're partway through your own process of generating a very practical marvel. I suspect you're now at a phase equivalent to Julia David Chandler's original recipe. Onward! Keep going!

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20): One of the most popular brands of candy in North America is Milk Duds. They're irregularly shaped globs of chocolate caramel. When they were first invented in 1926, the manufacturer's plan was to make them perfect little spheres. But with the rather primitive technology available at that time, this proved impossible. The finished products were blebs, not globes. They tasted good, though. Workers jokingly suggested that the new confection's name include "dud," a word meaning "failure" or "flop." Having sold well now for more than 90 years, Milk Duds have proved that success doesn't necessarily require perfection. Who knows? Maybe their dud-ness has been an essential part of their charm. I suspect there's a metaphorical version of Milk Duds in your future, Gemini.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22): In my vision of your life in the coming weeks, you're hunting for the intimate power that you lost a while back. After many twists and trials, you find it almost by accident in a seemingly unimportant location, a place you have paid little attention to for a long time. When you recognize it, and realize you can reclaim it, your demeanor transforms. Your eyes brighten, your skin glows, your body language galvanizes. A vivid hope arises in your imagination: how to make that once-lost, now-rediscovered power come alive again and be of use to you in the present time.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): The etymological dictionary says that the English slang word "cool" meant "calmly audacious" as far back as 1825. The term "groovy" was first used by jazz musicians in the 1930s to signify "performing well without grandstanding." "Hip," which was originally "hep," was also popularized by the jazz community. It meant "informed, aware, up-to-date." I'm bringing these words to your attention because I regard them as your words of power in the coming weeks. You can be and should be as hip, cool, and groovy as you have been in a long time.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): I hope you will seek out influences that give you grinning power over your worries. I hope you'll be daring enough to risk a breakthrough in service to your most demanding dream. I hope you will make an effort to understand yourself as your best teacher might understand you. I hope you will find out how to summon more faith in yourself—a faith not rooted in lazy wishes but in a rigorous self-assessment. Now here's my prediction: You will fulfill at least one of my hopes, and probably more.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): The Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski once performed for England's Queen Victoria. Since she possessed that bygone era's equivalent of a backstage pass, she was able to converse with him after the show. "You're a genius," she told him, having been impressed with his artistry. "Perhaps, Your Majesty," Paderewski said. "But before that I was a drudge." He meant that he had labored long and hard before reaching the mastery the queen attributed to him. According to my analysis of the astrological omens, you Libras are currently in an extended "drudge" phase of your own. That's a good thing! Take maximum advantage of this opportunity to slowly and surely improve your skills.

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): The ancient Greek poet Simonides was among the first of his profession to charge a fee for his services. He made money by composing verses on demand. On one occasion, he was asked to write a stirring tribute to the victor of a mule race. He declined, declaring that his sensibilities were too fine to create art for such a vulgar activity. In response, his potential patron dramatically boosted the proposed price. Soon thereafter, Simonides produced a rousing ode that included the phrase "wind-swift steeds." I offer the poet as a role model for you in the coming weeks, Scorpio. Be more flexible than usual about what you'll do to get the reward you'd like.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Here's the operative metaphor for you these days: You're like a painter who has had a vision of an interesting work of art you could create—but who lacks some of the paint colors you would require to actualize this art. You may also need new types of brushes you haven't used before. So here's how I suggest you proceed: Be aggressive in tracking down the missing ingredients or tools that will enable you to accomplish your as-yet imaginary masterpiece.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Useful revelations and provocative epiphanies are headed your way. But they probably won't arrive sheathed in sweetness and light, accompanied by tinkling swells of celestial music. It's more likely they'll come barging in with a clatter, bringing bristly marvels and rough hope. In a related matter: At least one breakthrough is in your imminent future. But this blessing is more likely to resemble a wrestle in the mud than a dance on a mountaintop. None of this should be a problem, however! I suggest you enjoy the rugged but interesting fun.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): One of the saddest aspects of our lives as humans is the disparity between love and romance. Real love is hard work. It's unselfish, unwavering, and rooted in generous empathy. Romance, on the other hand, tends to be capricious and inconstant, often dependent on the fluctuations of mood and chemistry. Is there anything you could do about this crazy-making problem, Aquarius? Like could you maybe arrange for your romantic experiences to be more thoroughly suffused with the primal power of unconditional love? I think this is a realistic request, especially in the coming weeks. You will have exceptional potential to bring more compassion and spiritual affection into your practice of intimacy.

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): In accordance with astrological omens, I invite you to dream up new rituals. The traditional observances and ceremonies bequeathed to you by your family and culture may satisfy your need for comfort and nostalgia, but not your need for renewal and reinvention. Imagine celebrating homemade rites of passage designed not for who you once were but for the new person you've become. You may be delighted to discover how much power they provide you to shape your life's long-term cycles. Ready to conjure up a new ritual right now? Take a piece of paper and write down two fears that inhibit your drive to create a totally interesting kind of success for yourself. Then burn that paper and those fears in the kitchen sink while chanting, "I am a swashbuckling incinerator of fears!"

freewillastrology@freewillastrology.com

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wed : may 16
7pm : kfai house party presents rich lewis band
9:30pm : javier matos

thu : may 17
9:30pm : cross pollination
w/ kyle shelstad of barbaro,
daniel patrick rosen of the gentlemen's
anti-temperance league, and
taylor donskey of darling lily gave

fri : may 18
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at 331 and The Sheridan Room
outdoors • 9pm : gay witch abortion
8pm : birthday suits 7pm : buildings
6pm : tongue party 5pm : ripper
indoors • 10pm : self-evident,
the flasher, rad owl

sat : may 19
ART-A-WHIRL 2018
at 331 and The Sheridan Room
outdoors • 9pm : charlie parr
8pm : hastings 3000 7pm : mark mallman
6pm : bnlx 5pm : black widows 4pm : sass
3pm : beasthead 2pm : hannah von der hof
1pm : the carnegies 12pm : witch watch
indoors • 10pm : venus demars & all the
pretty horses, buffalo fuzz

sun : may 20
ART-A-WHIRL 2018
at 331 and The Sheridan Room
outdoors • 8pm : all tomorrow's petty
7pm : fog 6pm : invisible boy
5pm : gaelynn lea 4pm : 26 bats
3pm : dua 2pm : joe kopel 1pm : 4th curtis

mon : may 21
8pm : the roe family singers
10pm : doug otto and friends

tue : may 22
7-9pm : t.e.e. – tuesday, early evening.
travis collins and peter miller
9:30pm : 331 club & fair state brewing coop present
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60						61								
62						63					64			
65						66					67			

IN A FOG

BY BRENDAN EMMETT QUIGLEY

Across

- 1 Wink at someone, say
6 You can see
right through it
10 Ship's shelter
14 One with a tank
15 The Herman Melville book
that isn't "Moby Dick"
16 Having the skill
17 Court debacle in Tehran?
20 Sweet crop
21 Guest columns
22 Like some sloppy kisses
23 Fruity cupful
24 Go past on the track
27 Hysterical line dances?
34 Out in the open
36 Email heading words
37 Fruity treat
38 Current line
39 Clotho and her crew
40 Currency with eight
different coins

- 41 Made a case for
42 Louisiana Purchase state
43 Fenway Park instrument
44 "That Shirley Booth
character's female?
Really?!"
47 Contact spot
48 Lock in place
49 Bad guy
51 Shoot for the moon
54 Deemphasize
60 Phrase of mock hysteria,
and a hint to

this puzzle's theme

- 62 Sick ____
63 "I can't believe
you fell for that"
64 Opera character that
[SPOILER ALERT]
jumps off a parapet
65 Hosp. workers
66 Maze goal
67 Big boom maker

Down

- 1 Banking letters
2 It's spent in Istanbul
3 Director Reitman
4 Self preservation plea?
5 Cut into thirds
6 Over three hours
7 Student activist González
8 Spooky film genre
9 "We're taking on water!"
10 One who works
with lots of studs
11 Award for "Oslo"
12 Slugger Guerrero,
commonly
13 Shocking predators
18 Enterprise vehicle
19 List words
23 You can't return them
24 Acidic
25 Central Spanish city
26 Blogger Hilton
28 Persian cry: Var.
29 Split
30 Coffee go with
31 Measure out

- 32 Grand display
33 It's about 14 pounds
35 Interior decorator's jobs
39 Official decree
43 Walking where everyone
else did in the woods
45 Block name
46 When Laertes
[SPOILER ALERT] dies
50 Place to get off
51 Taunt
52 Fallopiian tube germ
53 Muppet in
a vertical-striped shirt
54 Big Star's label
55 "I didn't recognize you!"
56 Accomplishment
57 Scrip amount
58 Lob's paths
59 Exam for some
coll. seniors
61 "Here's ____ last one"

Last Week's Answer

B	C	C		L	A	D	L	E		S	O	L	I	D
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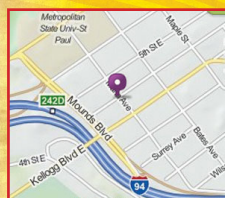


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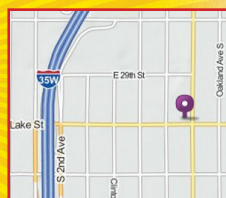
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SAVAGE LOVE

Leftovers

A few unanswered
questions from Savage
Love Live in Denver



Dan Savage

Savage Love Live at Denver's Oriental Theater last week was epic. I fielded sex questions in front of a sold-out crowd, singer-songwriter Rachel Lark performed amazing new songs, comedian Elise Kerns killed it, and Tye—a token straight guy plucked at random from the audience—joined us onstage and gave some pretty great sex advice! We couldn't get to all the audience questions, so I'm going to race through as many as I can here...

My boyfriend told me that women orgasm only 60 percent of the time compared to men. I said I want orgasm equity. How do I navigate his pansy-assed male ego to find a solution?

The orgasm gap—91 percent of men reported climaxing in their last opposite-sex sexual encounter compared to 64 percent of women (National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior)—doesn't exist for lesbians and bi women in same-sex relationships. So the problem isn't women and their elusive orgasms, it's men and their lazy-ass bullshit. A contributing factor is that women often have a hard time advocating for their own pleasure because they've been socialized to defer to men. There's evidence of that in your question: You want to navigate this problem—the problem being a selfish boyfriend who doesn't care enough about you to prioritize your pleasure and has taken cover behind the orgasm gap—but you want to spare his ego in the process. Fuck his precious ego. Tell him what you want and show him what it takes to get you off. If he refuses to do his part to close the orgasm gap in your apartment, show him the door.

How do you prioritize sex with your partner when life gets so busy and masturbation is so much easier? My fiancé is down for quickies sometimes but not always.

Forgive my tautology, but you prioritize sex by prioritizing sex. Scheduled sex can be awesome sex—and when you're truly pressed for time, you can always masturbate together.

How do I come out to my family as a stripper? I've been dancing for more than two years and don't plan to stop. Some of my family members are biased against sex workers,

but I'm tired of keeping up the facade (I told them I'm a bartender).

It's a catch-22: People are afraid to come out to their closed-minded families as queer or poly or sex workers or atheists, but closed-minded families typically don't open their minds until after their kids come out to them. To open their minds, you'll have to risk blowing them first. Tell them your truth and stand your ground.

I keep having sex dreams about Kanye West. What does that mean?

You're Mike Pence.

Am I doing society a disservice by dating an international drug dealer?

A sexually frustrated international drug dealer is arguably more dangerous than a sexually satisfied international drug dealer—so you may be doing society a service.

How clean should a bottom be? A little bit of shit is kinda expected, isn't it? I mean, you are fucking an ass, right?

My expectations for sterling silver, crystal stemware, and fuckable ass are the same: I want it sparkling.

Zooming out: One doesn't have anal sex with an ass full of shit for the same reason one doesn't have oral sex with a mouth full of food—it's going to make a mess. Making sure your mouth is empty is easy, of course, but it's not that difficult to empty or clean out an ass. Also, a good, fiber-rich diet empties and cleans out the ass naturally. Yes, you are fucking an ass, that's true, and shit sometimes happens. The top shouldn't poop-shame the bottom when it does happen, and the bottom doesn't need to have a meltdown. It just means you need to pivot to some other sexual activity—after a quick cleanup restores the sparkle.

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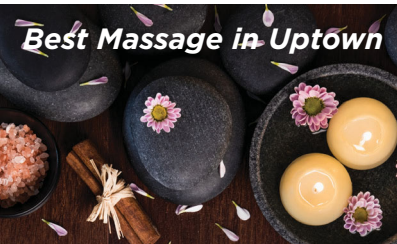
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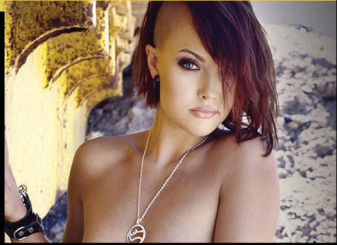

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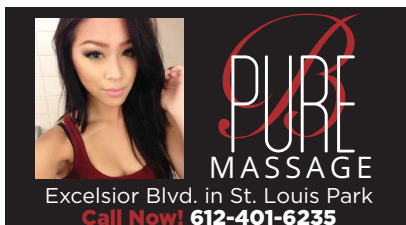
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